



desires
OF OUR
HEART

sermon series & study guide

Fall 2015



DESIRES OF OUR HEART
2015 Fall Study Guide

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OVERVIEW

“Everybody’s Got a Hungry Heart”

Whether you are young or old, male or female, rich or poor we share the same basic desires. Bruce Springsteen* said it best:

“Everybody needs a place to rest
Everybody wants to have a home
Don't make no difference what nobody says
Ain't nobody like to be alone
Everybody’s got a hungry heart
Lay down your money and you play your part
Everybody's got a hungry heart”ⁱ

St. Augustine would agree. Seventeen hundred years earlier he had a similar perspective on life. What drives us is desire and at the core of all our desires is our fundamental need for God: “You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”ⁱⁱ Created in the image of God, we long for God to fulfill us and give order to all our wants and needs.

And yet, our hungry hearts eat themselves up. This divine longing is misdirected toward other things that can never satisfy us. But even in these desires is a reflection (to be sure, distorted) of our deeper desire for life in God.

Ironically, when we focus our desire on God, we discover that God fulfills all our desires. All people need the basics: peace, affirmation, purpose, legacy and companionship. Those basic needs are met when we seek God first. This is why

the Psalmist wrote, “Take delight in the Lord and God will give you the desires of your heart” (37:4).

The words of the Psalm are the central theme for this study. Each week we will explore one of the five basic desires and the way God fulfilled them in the lives of key people in the Old Testament. We can relate to the struggles of David, Joseph, Joshua, Jeremiah, Ruth and Naomi because our needs are timeless and God is eternal. By reflecting on their stories we can get in touch with our needs. We can learn how to trust in God to give us the desires of our hearts.

Whether you are doing this with a small group or on your own, this study guide is designed to help kindle your passion for God. Each week’s scripture readings will be featured in Sundays’ services and sermons. Each session features reflection questions to aid your personal introspection and to guide your conversations. Each week includes a spiritual exercise based on Psalm 37:4 that you can use every day. At the end of the study are tips on how to use the centering songs.

Reader beware: This study will challenge you to take a deeper look at what pushes your buttons. Over the next several weeks listen closely to your heart and do not attempt to arrive at a quick explanation about how you feel. Beware of religiosity. Sometimes we repress our true feelings with religious jargon and try to squeeze the messiness of our feeling into prefabricated spiritual explanations. All God requires is our honesty. If we

are willing to let God's Spirit lead us through this process we will develop a more authentic faith.

As you begin this study, slowly recite the Psalm and settle into these words:

“Take delight in the Lord and God will give you the desires of your heart”

Pastor Darren
Fall 2015

SESSION ONE: OUR DESIRE FOR PEACE

INTRODUCTION

Move over *Game of Thrones* because I Samuel 23 begins like a movie. The leading man is on the run, but from whom or what we do not know.

Next there is a flashback so we can learn what has created his desperate fate. The flashback begins in chapter eighteen when Jonathan, the son of King Saul, made a covenant with David who had been put in charge of Saul's troops. Saul's jealousy was enflamed by David's music and popularity, and so he tried to get David killed in battle against their archenemies, the Philistines. Saul promised to give his daughter, Michal, in marriage to David if he would bring back the foreskin of a hundred Philistines as a bride price. To his surprise, David did it and his popularity grew.

Next, Saul plotted to assassinate David, but Michal helped him escape by lowering him down through a window. Later, Jonathan helped David avoid another attempt to trap him. After this, David never returned to Jerusalem, but was on the run with a small band of dissident warriors outfoxing Saul while fighting the Philistines.

By chapter twenty-three, Saul thinks he has David trapped in the fortress town of Keilah, which David had liberated from the Philistines. But God

warned David to retreat into the hills of Ziph before Saul's troops could arrive. Eventually, the conflict between David and Saul died down after David caught Saul in a vulnerable spot but refused to kill him (see I Samuel 24). But in this week's reading, Saul still had the upper hand.

Do you remember when your problems were in hot pursuit of you and it felt like they would never end? We long for security and peace of mind. Over time, we become weary and react in self-defeating ways if we do not have the assurance of God's protection. Like the old hymn, we need to learn how to say, "whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul." David's story illustrates how God works behind the scenes to protect and guide us through life's struggles. In this session, we learn how to look for and trust in God's providential care.

CENTERING SONG

"Stand By Me" Charles Albert Tindley

When the storms of life are raging,
stand by me (stand by me);
when the storms of life are raging,
stand by me (stand by me).
When the world is tossing me
like a ship upon the sea,

thou who rulest wind and water,
Stand by me (stand by me).

In the midst of tribulation,
stand by me (stand by me);
in the midst of tribulation,
stand by me (stand by me).
When the hosts of hell assail,
and my strength begins to fail,
thou who never lost a battle,
stand by me (stand by me).

In the midst of faults and failures,
stand by me (stand by me);
in the midst of faults and failures,
stand by me (stand by me).
When I do the best I can,
and my friends misunderstand,
thou who knowest all about me,
stand by me (stand by me).

In the midst of persecution,
stand by me (stand by me);
in the midst of persecution,
stand by me (stand by me).
When my foes in battle array
undertake to stop my way,
thou who savèd Paul and Silas,
stand by me (stand by me).

When I'm growing old and feeble,
stand by me (stand by me);
when I'm growing old and feeble,
stand by me (stand by me).
When my life becomes a burden,
and I'm nearing chilly Jordan,
O thou "Lily of the Valley,"
stand by me (stand by me).

SCRIPTURE I Samuel 23:15-29

¹⁵ David was in the Wilderness of Ziph at Horesh when he learned that Saul had come out to seek his life. ¹⁶ Saul's son Jonathan set out and came to David at Horesh; there he strengthened his hand through the Lord. ¹⁷ He said to him, 'Do not be afraid; for the hand of my father Saul shall not find you; you shall be king over Israel, and I shall be second to you; my father Saul also knows that this is so.' ¹⁸ Then the two of them made a covenant before the Lord; David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went home.

¹⁹ Then some Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah and said, 'David is hiding among us in the strongholds of Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is south of Jeshimon.' ²⁰ Now, O king, whenever you wish to come down, do so; and our part will be to surrender him into the king's hand.' ²¹ Saul said, 'May you be blessed by the Lord for showing me compassion!' ²² Go and make sure once

more; find out exactly where he is, and who has seen him there; for I am told that he is very cunning. ²³Look around and learn all the hiding-places where he lurks, and come back to me with sure information. Then I will go with you; and if he is in the land, I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah.’ ²⁴So they set out and went to Ziph ahead of Saul.

David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Arabah to the south of Jeshimon. ²⁵Saul and his men went to search for him. When David was told, he went down to the rock and stayed in the wilderness of Maon. When Saul heard that, he pursued David into the wilderness of Maon. ²⁶Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. David was hurrying to get away from Saul, while Saul and his men were closing in on David and his men to capture them. ²⁷Then a messenger came to Saul, saying, ‘Hurry and come; for the Philistines have made a raid on the land.’ ²⁸So Saul stopped pursuing David, and went against the Philistines; therefore that place was called the Rock of Escape. ²⁹David then went up from there, and lived in the strongholds of En-gedi.

EXPLORING THE STORY

What role does Jonathan play in this story?
Compare this story with other events in Jonathan

and David's relationship (see I Samuel 18:1-5; 19:1-7; 20:1-42).

What is ironic about Saul's words in v. 21 when compared with I Samuel 18:12?

What caused Saul to stop pursuing David so that he could escape?

EXPLORING OUR STORIES

Right now, how would you rate your level of peace, with 1 being "completely at peace with my situation" to 5 being "My problems are in hot pursuit!"

Think of a crisis you faced in the past:

- Who or what was Saul to you? Who or what were the Ziphites that made the crisis worse?
- Did it get resolved? If so, how?
- As you look back at that crisis, what do you think God was doing at that time in your life?

Check any of the following ways God has given you peace of mind:

- a scripture passage
- a song
- words of another person
- a change of circumstances
- a needed resource

Is God's peace a state of mind or a set of circumstances? Or both?

God used Jonathan to reassure and direct David to safety. Who has been your Jonathan? How did they help you see your present circumstances and/or future prospects differently?

WEEKLY PRAYER EXERCISE WITH PSALM 37:4

“Take delight in the Lord and God will give you the desires of your heart”

Begin by slowing down your breathing with several long, slow breaths. Then begin a “breath prayer” by thinking or saying quietly as you inhale, “Take delight in the Lord.” Then, exhale slowly, thinking or saying quietly, “and God will give you the desires of your heart.” Do this breath prayer once a day for one week.

SESSION TWO: OUR DESIRE FOR AFFIRMATION

INTRODUCTION

Joseph was born into a dysfunctional family system which would make anyone doubt themselves. His father, Jacob, put the “fun” in dysfunctional. His mother Rachel was unable to get pregnant, so Jacob fathered two sons with her servant Bilhah. He did the same thing with his other wife (Rachel’s sister) Leah, and had two more sons with her servant Zilpah. Eventually, Leah gave birth to six more sons. Finally, Rachel was the last to conceive his two youngest boys: Joseph and Benjamin. Two wives, two concubines and twelve sons in all. No wonder there was competition and turmoil in the house of Israel.

Joseph needed God’s affirmation to overcome the brokenness of his family and the challenges of his future. His twofold vision of God’s assurance in this week’s reading is immediately followed by a series of life-threatening situations. His brothers attacked him and left him for wild animals to kill. His brother Judah sold him to a caravan of Ishmaelites who took him down to Egypt where he was sold as a house slave to Potiphar. Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce him and when Joseph resisted she concocted charges against him that landed him in jail.

Through it all, God was working behind the scenes to make his dreams come true. Joseph's talent for dream interpretation opened a door of opportunity for him. At the same time he was in prison, the king's cupbearer and baker were incarcerated, and they needed Joseph's help interpreting their dreams. Years later, after the cupbearer had been released, he recommended that the king tap Joseph for some needed dream work. His interpretations helped the king avoid a disastrous famine and he appointed Joseph governor over his domestic policies. This put Joseph in a key position when his brothers came south to Egypt looking for famine relief. By the end of the story, his original dreams had come true. His brothers had to bow to him. Those boyhood dreams gave him the affirmation he needed to navigate this long, winding journey.

God gives us assurance so that we can navigate the twists and turns of our lives. Paul says, "There is therefore now no condemnation in Jesus Christ....For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God" (Romans 8:1, 14). God's unconditional love in Jesus Christ gives us the confidence we need to persevere. When others question and doubt us, God's affirmation remains rock solid. This week we will explore Joseph's story and listen for the Spirit's affirmation for our lives.

CENTERING SONG

“Blessed Assurance” Fanny Crosby

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.

Refrain:

This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Savior all the day long;
this is my story, this is my song,
praising my Savior all the day long.

Perfect submission, perfect delight,
visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
angels descending bring from above
echoes of mercy, whispers of love.
(Refrain)

Perfect submission, all is at rest;
I in my Savior am happy and blest,
watching and waiting, looking above,
filled with his goodness, lost in his love.
(Refrain)

SCRIPTURE GENESIS 37:2-11

²This is the story of the family of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. ³Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. ⁴But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

⁵Once Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. ⁶He said to them, 'Listen to this dream that I dreamed. ⁷There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it, and bowed down to my sheaf.' ⁸His brothers said to him, 'Are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to have dominion over us?' So they hated him even more because of his dreams and his words.

⁹He had another dream, and told it to his brothers, saying, 'Look, I have had another dream: the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.' ¹⁰But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him, and said to him, 'What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground

before you?' ¹¹So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

EXPLORING THE STORY

What do we learn about the family dynamics?

What are your impressions of Joseph and his dreams? Was this youthful arrogance or godly confidence?

How might these dreams have given Joseph courage to face future trials and to handle future success?

EXPLORING OUR STORIES

What has shaken your confidence?

Have you ever been criticized for doing the right thing? Were you aware of God's presence at that time?

How has God given you reassurance and affirmation (choose as many as apply):

- a special scripture passage
- words of others
- a dream or vision
- an award, promotion, or other form of recognition
- an unusual experience
- a feeling of calm assurance
- a song

Timeline of Blessed Assurance:

Make a timeline of the major events in your life. Above the line make a check mark for all the good things and an x for all the hard times. Then, below the line put one of the following letters to indicate what God was doing in your life directing [D], correcting [C], protecting [P], sustaining [S], and/or affirming [A].

How can we distinguish between human arrogance and divine affirmation?

When have you seen someone seeking the wrong kind of affirmation?

WEEKLY PRAYER EXERCISE WITH PSALM 37:4

“Take delight in the Lord and God will give you the desires of your heart”

Over the next 5 days, focus on each one of your 5 senses:

- Day 1: seeing
- Day 2: hearing
- Day 3: tasting
- Day 4: touching
- Day 5: smelling

With the sense of the day become aware of what brings you delight. For example, on day 5 become conscious of the things you like to smell. Begin and end each day by reciting Psalm 37:4 and throughout the day as you think about and experience the delights of your senses, consider how you are experiencing God through that particular sense. At each day's end, give God thanks for those divine encounters.

SESSION THREE: OUR DESIRE FOR PURPOSE

INTRODUCTION

In 2002 Rick Warren published *The Purpose Driven Life*. This devotional book outlines a forty day program for discerning God's calling. In the first five years, Zondervan sold over 30 million copies. Its popularity reflects a basic human desire for purpose and meaning. Merely existing is never enough, we long for a sense of direction from a higher power and a purpose greater than ourselves whom we can serve.

God gave Joshua clear direction for his future, but Joshua was unsure he was up for the task. Moses, his mentor and leader, had died before they reached Canaan. Now, God was passing on Moses' mantle to Joshua to lead them into the Promised Land. Why Joshua? He had been loyal when everyone else had worshipped the golden calf. He and Caleb were the only scouts that had reported back to Moses that the Israelites could indeed be victorious if they entered Canaan. Yet, Joshua had always been a lieutenant, never the general. Now, God was calling him to a bigger mission.

In this session we will examine the ways God calls us. Like Joshua, we will confront our questions

and reservations, and we will discover how God is equipping us for a purpose greater than ourselves.

CENTERING SONG

“We Are Called” David Haas

Come! Live in the light!
Shine with the joy and the love of the Lord!
We are called to be light for the kingdom,
to live in the freedom of the city of God!

Refrain:

We are called to act with justice,
we are called to love tenderly,
we are called to serve one another,
to walk humbly with God.

Come! Open your heart!
Show your mercy to all those in fear!
We are called to be hope for the hopeless
so all hatred and blindness will be no more!
(Refrain)

Sing! Sing a new song!
Sing of that great day when all will be one!
God will reign, and we'll walk with each other
as sisters and brothers united in love!
(Refrain)

SCRIPTURE Joshua 1:1-9

¹After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, ²'My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. ³Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. ⁴From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. ⁵No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. ⁶Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. ⁷Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. ⁸This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. ⁹I hereby command you: Be strong and

courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

EXPLORING THE STORY

What promise is given to Joshua and how many times is it given (v. 3-5, 9)?

What role does the past play in giving him confidence to take on this task (v. 6)?

What must Joshua do to be successful (v. 7)?

EXPLORING OUR STORIES

When have you been given a task that you felt inadequate to take on?

As you look back over your life, when have you felt the strongest sense that a particular job or venture was God's will? When have you had the most doubt about God's purpose?

Rank the following in terms of how well they help you discern God's will for your future (1=most helpful; 7=least helpful):

- ___ conversation with other people
- ___ listening for the Spirit through worship and song
- ___ finding confirmation in a scripture passage
- ___ change of circumstances and new opportunities opening up
- ___ long walks and quiet meditation
- ___ making a list of all your options and outlining the pros and cons
- ___ other:

What do you think is God’s direction for your life in the coming year? How has God been preparing you?

What role does obedience to God play in determining whether or not something is God’s will?

What happened to us when we do not pursue our callings? What prevents us from pursuing it?

WEEKLY PRAYER EXERCISE WITH PSALM 37:4

“Take delight in the Lord and God will give you the desires of your heart”

Step 1: Say silently several times: “Take delight in the Lord” and center your thoughts on God, meditating on the attributes of God. What is the

one characteristic of God that comes to the forefront of your thinking?

Step 2: Then, say silently several times: “and God will give me the desires of my heart.” Ask yourself: What do I desire over and over again? Then ask yourself: Do these desires express some deeper needs I have?

Step 3: Finally, using the characteristic identified in Step 1 as a name for God, offer the following prayer: “[your name for God], I surrender my desires to you.” For example, if the characteristic is divine power, you might pray: “Strong God, I surrender my desires to you.”

SESSION FOUR: OUR DESIRE FOR A LEGACY

INTRODUCTION

A few years ago Ginny and I finalized our wills. They include standard language about the inheritance of personal property, such as our automobiles. Our daughters got a good laugh when we shared that one of them would inherit 'Old Chamey.' That was the name they gave our 1999 Pontiac Montana because its color was champagne. The Montana often made me think of a variety of alcoholic beverages, but champagne was not one of them. So, no one was disappointed when one of the girls totaled Old Chamey late one night, which improved their inheritance with a new car.

All of us have a need to leave a legacy, regardless of whether it is in chrome and rubber. Perhaps it has something to do with our desire for immortality or maybe it is the sense that we are a part of something larger than ourselves. From the beginning of time, humans have sought to leave their mark in stones, wood and paper for future generations to remember that they were here.

God fulfills this desire by inviting us to participate in God's hope. We contribute to God's future plans through our acts of mercy, justice and peace. The legacy we leave is an act of faith,

trusting that God will bring to completion what we have started long after we are gone.

It was an outrageous act of faith for Jeremiah to leave his legacy in the land. This session's reading is a real estate deal. There could not have been a worse time to invest in property. Jerusalem was under siege by the Babylonians and Jeremiah was in prison in the capital city. Shortly, they would be sacked and deported. A few miles away was his hometown of Anathoth, the ancient home of priests. By law, he had the first rights to the homestead, but why would he want it, given the dire political situation? As a prophet who had foretold the invasion and impending deportation, Jeremiah knew the score. And yet, God wanted him to buy it as his legacy.

As you explore Jeremiah's legacy listen for God's opportunities for your own legacy.

CENTERING SONG

"The Gift of Love" Hal Hopson

Though I may speak with bravest fire,
and have the gift to all inspire,
and have not love, my words are vain,
as sounding brass, and hopeless gain.

Though I may give all I possess,
and striving so my love profess,

but not be given by love within,
the profit soon turns strangely thin.

Come, Spirit, come, our hearts control,
our spirits long to be made whole.
Let inward love guide every deed;
by this we worship, and are freed.

SCRIPTURE Jeremiah 32:6-19

⁶Jeremiah said, The word of the Lord came to me: ⁷Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.' ⁸Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the Lord, and said to me, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself.' Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord.

⁹And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. ¹⁰I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. ¹¹Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; ¹²and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of

the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard. ¹³In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, ¹⁴Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. ¹⁵For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

¹⁶ After I had given the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah, I prayed to the Lord, saying: ¹⁷Ah Lord God! It is you who made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you. ¹⁸You show steadfast love to the thousandth generation, but repay the guilt of parents into the laps of their children after them, O great and mighty God whose name is the Lord of hosts, ¹⁹great in counsel and mighty in deed; whose eyes are open to all the ways of mortals, rewarding all according to their ways and according to the fruit of their doings.

EXPLORING THE STORY

What does the purchase of land symbolize about God's hope?

What does it tell us about Jeremiah's faith? What doubts do you think he had?

Is his prayer a celebration of or a resignation to God's will (v. 17-25)?

EXPLORING OUR STORIES

Is there one thing you would hope your family and friends would keep in remembrance of you? Is there one thing you hope they get rid of?

How have you been impacted by someone's legacy?

What comfort is there in a long term assurance when you are facing an immediate crisis?

What role does prayer play in your decision making about the future?

God calls us to make an investment right now that will become our legacy of faith. Check any of the following types of 'investments' you feel you need to make:

- a financial gift
- sharing your experience & skills with another person
- giving your time to an organization
- affirming someone
- other:

What challenges do we face in leaving a faithful legacy?

WEEKLY PRAYER EXERCISE WITH PSALM 37:4

“Take delight in the Lord and God will give you the desires of your heart”

Begin by reading Psalm 37:4 as an opening prayer, inviting God to guide your thinking.

Part 1: Review your spending on all non-essential things over the past month. How do you define what is non-essential? What does this say about what you take delight in?

Part 2: Review all your giving, investing and savings. What does this say about the desires of your heart?

End your time of meditation by reading Psalm 37:4 as a prayer of dedication.

SESSION FIVE: OUR DESIRE FOR COMPANIONSHIP

INTRODUCTION

Across the field and down the road lived my great grandmother, Lola Brown. She shared a plot of land with her sister-in-law, Lula Brown, with their tiny houses divided by a pea-gravel driveway and a thick row of peonies. “Lolo” and “Luli”, as we kids knew them, spent their days tending their truck patch garden. At night, when Luli heard strange noises scratching at her window (she claimed they were demons), Lolo would walk over and reassure her that all was safe. They had lived beside each other for decades after their husbands (brothers, Walter and Wesley) had passed away.

Bruce Springsteen is right, “Don't make no difference what nobody says/ain't nobody like to be alone/everybody's got a hungry heart.” In this session we will explore the universal need for companionship. We are not solitary creatures. Created in the image of the Triune God, we are spiritually wired to be in relationships for the flourishing of human life. Whether it is a spouse, a cousin, a neighbor, a coworker or a friend, our hearts are hungry for companionship. God fulfills that desire by bringing people into our lives who will affirm and challenge us to become what God has made us to be.

The book of Ruth begins with a crisis that threatens human flourishing. Famine is in the land of Moab. Years earlier Elimelech and Naomi had moved to Moab from their hometown of Bethlehem to the west in Judah. Their two sons had married two Moabite girls, Orpah and Ruth. Ten years later famine hit and the men died. Three widows were left destitute in a patriarchal culture and collapsing economy.

When Naomi decided to return to her hometown, her daughters-in-law were supposed to seek help from their Moabite extended families. Watch closely what Ruth decided to do because it is one of the most profound acts of faith in the Bible.

CENTERING SONG

“Draw Us in the Spirit’s Tether” Percy Dearmer

Draw us in the Spirit’s tether,
for when humbly in thy name,
two or three are met together,
thou art in the midst of them.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Touch we now thy garment’s hem.

As disciples used to gather
in the name of Christ to sup,
then with thanks to God the Father,

break the bread and bless the cup:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
So now bind our friendship up.

All our meals and all our living
make as sacraments of thee,
that by caring, helping, giving,
we may true disciples be.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
We will serve thee faithfully.

SCRIPTURE Ruth 1:6-18

⁶ Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had had consideration for his people and given them food. ⁷So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. ⁸But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.' Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. ¹⁰They said to her, 'No, we will return with you to your people.' ¹¹But Naomi said, 'Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your

husbands? ¹²Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, ¹³would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me.'

¹⁴Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁵So she said, 'See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.' ¹⁶But Ruth said,

'Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from following you!

Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.

¹⁷Where you die, I will die—
there will I be buried.

May the Lord do thus and so to me,
and more as well,

if even death parts me from you!

¹⁸When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

EXPLORING THE STORY

Why does Naomi tell Orpah and Ruth to turn back?

How is Ruth's decision an act of faith? Compare it with Abram's act of faith in Genesis 12:1-9. How is her decision a more profound act of faith than Abram's?

Why do you think Naomi was silent at the end of the story (v. 18)?

Read the entire book of Ruth. How does God respond to Ruth's fidelity to Naomi?

EXPLORING OUR STORIES

When faced with a problem, is your tendency to share it with others or to keep it to yourself?

Think of a crisis you faced and you were supported by another person. What did they do that was helpful (check as many as apply):

- a quiet presence
- gave good advice
- allowed you to complain & share your feelings
- advocated for you
- did something concrete that was helpful
- other:

What risks do we take in being a companion (Ruth) and in receiving companionship (Naomi)?

There were religious and ethnic conflicts between Israelites and Moabites. When have religious and

ethnic differences complicated your relationships?
When have you been blessed by a diversity of
friends?

WEEKLY PRAYER EXERCISE WITH PSALM 37:4

“Take delight in the Lord and God will give you the
desires of your heart”

Pray for a different person each day of the week
using Psalm 37:4 as the form of intercessory
prayer: “May [name] take delight in you, Lord, and
may you fulfill the desires of his/her heart.”

IDEAS FOR USING CENTERING SONGS

Music is a wonderful way to prepare our hearts and minds for receiving God’s Word. Each session includes a hymn to begin your personal reflections and small group conversations. Some of them are well known and a few may be new to you. The hymns will be featured in worship each Sunday. Here are some ways you can use them:

- Sing them! Try using different tunes in addition to the one’s given in the hymnal:
 - Stand By Me—512 *United Methodist Hymnal*
 - Blessed Assurance—369 *United Methodist Hymnal*
 - We Are Called—2172 *The Faith We Sing*
 - The Gift of Love—408 *United Methodist Hymnal*
 - Draw Us in the Spirit’s Tether—632 *United Methodist Hymnal*
- Read them in a round with a different person reading each verse. If there is a refrain, read it in unison.
- After reading each verse, pause for silent prayer.
- Read the backstory about the song and its composer. Besides finding this information online, you can find it in *Companion to the United Methodist Hymnal* by Carlton R.

Young, which can be found in our church library (783.9 YOU).

ⁱ Bruce Springsteen, "Hungry Heart," recorded October 17, 1980 on *The River*, Columbia.

ⁱⁱ Augustine, *Confessions*. Translated by Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford U Press, 1991. p. 3

THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT BANNER

The pictures on the cover are from a banner created by Doris Douglas. Through true generosity, Doris dedicated her time, her creative self and the collection of banners to North Church to be displayed throughout the year in the Sanctuary. North Church is truly thankful for her generous gifts.

The green speaks of everlasting green and symbolizes the renewal of living things and the promise of new life. The five words embellished with yarn are Praise, Forgiveness, Harmony, Justice and Shalom – meaning peace. This banner should be used to offer praise and gratitude. The dove is a symbol of peace; doves are symbols of the faithful souls that want to be with those around the cross. This banner explodes with all the freshness and enduring growth of the Spirit and reminds us of what is offered to us through Jesus Christ.